

Imperfect Normality by Nevermore_red

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Summary:

An evening with Joyce and Hopper almost a year after their trip to the Upside Down.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

Basically my attempt to appease myself until Season 2 rolls around when I'm drowning in Jopper feels. Enjoy :)

A year had almost passed since Will came home, since Joyce and Hopper *brought* Will home. Things had settled into a new sort of normal. Not like it had been before his disappearance, but something similar.

Joyce still worked herself raw, pulling doubles at the store and working holidays. With Will's hospital bills and the work needed done on the house, she'd also picked up odd jobs here and there. Babysitting Holly for the Wheelers or picking up groceries and cleaning old lady Hanson's house.

Will was good. Or, he was good most of the time. He'd stopped hacking up slugs that Joyce eventually caught him coughing up one evening. They killed them, although one had gotten into the water system before Will had told Joyce what was going on. They had yet to see anything come of it, although Joyce had told Hopper who presumably took care of it with his 'moonlighting' job for Hawkins Energy. Will still had nightmares, still flashed back at times until he was convinced he was back in that other place, but he really seemed to be improving.

Jonathan seemed more put together than the rest of them. He continued working nights and weekends at the theatre or doing yard work for people. He actually had friends now, which he hadn't before, even though Joyce worried about his pining for Nancy Wheeler when she was still with that stupid Harrington kid. Hop reminded her often that Steve was a good kid. He had helped save Jonathan's life, after all.

Hop...Hop was something Joyce had trouble putting into a certain category or box. He was her friend, of course. Although they hadn't talked a whole lot after he'd come back to Hawkins after Sara passed,

they were cordial enough. Their failed attempt at a relationship in high school a distant memory. She had been the poor girl that smoked behind the stadium and wore too much black while not caring at all about sports. Jim had been the jock, star football player and school heart throb. Everyone always knew he was going places and that Joyce wasn't. They had been an experiment of sorts to each other. Jim likely wanted to slum it a bit and Joyce wanted to prove to herself and to her friends she could get a guys attention. It had become blindingly obvious to both of them that they weren't meant to be together when Joyce spent her weekends sneaking out of the house to get away from a verbally abusive father and checked out mother and Hopper had snuck out just to piss off his well to do and loving parents. Realization came in the form of Chrissy Carpenter and Lonnie Byers. Chrissy was from Jim's world, Lonnie from hers. They'd drifted apart, nothing dramatic or overly emotional.

Joyce regretted it the moment it happened, but her life was always regrets. What difference did that one make?

Jim left right out of high school, and Joyce got pregnant. They didn't see or speak again until he came back years later, no longer so hard bodied but still attractive, his heart shattered and his mind fogged by drink. They waved to each other when they saw each other, saying hi as they passed by. He came out himself when Lonnie came back one night demanding she take him back while trying to break into her window. There had been one single punch, a broken nose, hand cuffing, and then Hop told her to be sure to call if she ever needed anything again.

It would be another year and a half before she would need him again, this time to bring her boy back. And he had. Joyce didn't know all the specifics on how he managed to get it done, the lab letting them into that Upside Down place, and she never asked. He did what he had to, and she would always be thankful to him for that.

It was in the months after that awful week that old feelings began to resurface. Maybe it was because she had been in forced contact with him for that week, or maybe it was that he always seemed to just be there afterwards. He came over at least once a week, helping to replace carpet and wallpaper. When the dog had gotten hit by a car and was barely alive, Joyce had called him in tears while Jonathan

and Will hugged each other, both unwilling to pick up a gun to end the poor thing. Not that they owned a gun any longer. Jim was there in ten minutes. He'd taken care of the dog, even helping Jonathan dig a grave out by the trees to bury him.

He helped Will reintegrate himself into the real world, coming to pick him up and take him to the Wheelers when Will was still too afraid to get on a bike and Joyce and Jonathan had to work, or taking all four of the boys to the next town over when a new arcade opened up. He was there for Jonathan, helping him build his portfolio to send to NYU and fill out applications for colleges. Giving him advice about Nancy and what it meant to be a man.

Joyce loved having him around. Hop seemed to enjoy being around as well, since he came over so often. The first time he tried to offer money to Joyce when she was stressing over a stack of bills and her bank account print out she had slapped his hand away. She could do it herself, and didn't want charity. He'd never offered money again. But the monthly hospital bills stopped coming all the sudden and there was always an extra twenty or so in the coffee tin that neither Joyce or Jonathan had put in there.

He drank less, smiled more, and stopped seeming like he was carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders. Of course he still had bad days where he was drunk and wanted to do nothing but lay on his sofa and wallow in his grief, but they were becoming less frequent and when they did happen, Joyce was there to help him pick up the mess.

It was two days ago that he had asked her out. On a date. An *actual* date. Not two friends hanging out over coffee while her kids played Atari or listened to music. Hop wanted to take her to a new steak house that had opened in the next town over. There would be candle light and wine.

Joyce said yes without much thought to it, but now she was frantic. She hadn't been on a date in...well, Lonnie never actually took her on a date. So probably never, then. Karen had gone with her yesterday to buy a new dress. Blue and simple, it fell to her mid calf and actually fit unlike most of her baggy second hand clothing. Karen had insisted that it looked lovely and complimented her pale skin tone.

It was in the shower when she really started to doubt her decision. She had washed her body with the soap bar and ran a razor over her neglected legs and had picked up the two in one shampoo and conditioner that she always bought so all three of them could use it. Jim's exploits weren't a secret and Joyce honestly didn't care, but for some reason as she picked up that cheap shampoo, she felt like crying. Hop had likely been with women far fancier than her. Probably women that smelled like flowers and coconuts and Joyce just knew his wife was one of those women. How in the world did she expect to measure up? She was poor, damaged, unpolished, and anxiety riddled. Eccentric was the nice term people called her. Crazy the not so nice one.

Sitting the bottle back on the ledge, she slowly sank down to sit in the bottom of the tub, drawing her knees up to her chest. What was she thinking? It's the exact reason why she had went with Lonnie instead of Jim back in school. He wasn't in the same league as her, even now that he had fallen so far. No matter how many times she shaved her legs or put on a nice dress that she really shouldn't have bought because the money could have been better spent on one of the boys or the house, she would never measure up to the women he had been with. And while she was aware he didn't care for any of them, that only drove her point further home. How could he care for her, skittish, crazy Joyce that used generic two in one shampoo and hadn't had sex in close to five years?

She hadn't even been enough to keep Lonnie fucking Byers around.

Unaware of how long she had sat in the bottom of the tub, the water turning cold, she jumped and let out a startled scream when someone knocked on the bathroom door. Neither of the boys were home, Will staying over at Dustin's for an indoor camping night and Jonathan off doing whatever it was he did with Nancy and Steve.

"Joyce?" Hopper's deep voice, laced with worry, came through the door. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, yeah." she stood quickly, slipping a little and catching herself on the tile wall. "I'm...I'm fine, Hop. Just give me a second."

"You sure?" he questioned.

"Positive. Just...just make yourself at home. I'll be right out." Hurriedly washing her hair with the crappy shampoo, she quickly dried off and brushed out her hair. Wrapping her fuzzy robe around herself, she stepped out into the hall and took a deep breath before leaning around the corner to find Hopper sitting in the chair in the living room, an ankle crossed over his knee, hat in his hand as it tapped his knee.

"Sorry." she gave him a quick smile, drawing his attention away from staring absently at the coffee table. "I lost track of time. I'll just be a few more minutes."

He cocked his head to the side, the amused smile on his face slipping as his heavy brow furrowed. "Everything alright?"

"OH, yeah." she waved him off with a forced laugh. "Just, you know. Time got away from me and showering and makeup and hair and...you know. All that stuff."

Hopper pushed himself up from the chair, tossing his hat onto the coffee table. He wore a nice pair of jeans and a blue and grey plaid shirt. An unlit cigarette hung from his right hand.

"I don't know, actually." he said with a grin. "Seems more like women stuff. But, no worries. Take your time. I'll be here."

She gave him a quick smile of thanks, then scurried off to her bedroom where the dress was laid out for her. Karen had let her borrow a bottle of perfume and heels that matched. Finding her best pair of underwear, which were honestly not all that nice, she shrugged on her newest bra and put the dress on. After blow drying her hair, she put on some mascara and lipstick and called it good. Mostly because she didn't own anything else. Slipping on her heels, she dotted the perfume on her wrist and then her neck and took a deep breath. No backing out now, Jim was waiting. And she refused to have spent the money on the dress and then not wear it.

"Will is staying with Dustin tonight and I'm pretty sure he got everything he needed, but just in case I gave him the number to the restaurant that we'll be at." she babbled as she came down the hall, needing something to say to mask her nerves as she fidgeted with the

little belt that went around her waist.

Hopper stood up from the chair once again. "Joyce."

"Jonathan knows where we're going also, and he said that he would be at the Wheelers and Will could call him if he needed. So I think we're good." she continued, refusing to look up at him.

"Joyce."

"This belt is annoying, though. It doesn't feel tight enough but it's as tight as it'll go."

Hopper reached out and caught her wrists, pulling her frantic fingers away from toying with her belt. With a nervous drag of breath in, she looked up at him. He smiled softly, a curling of only one corner of his mouth.

"You look fine. Great, actually. Don't worry about the belt. Or take it off if it bothers you."

"Karen said it brings the dress together." Joyce countered, looking down at his long fingers still wrapped around her wrists. They were so long they overlapped.

"Sure that's not the zipper down the back?" he teased and Joyce snorted a laugh.

"I don't think she meant it that way."

"Then keep the belt." he let go of her wrists and put his hands in his pockets. He smelled good. Like soap and cigarettes and man. "And don't worry about the boys. If there's any two boys that can take care of themselves, it's them. They'll be fine."

Joyce nodded, lifting her chin and straightening her shoulders. He was right. Her boys would be fine. If there was ever anything she had done right in her life, it was raising them. If only that was what she was so nervous about.

"Ready?" he asked, turning to grab his hat from the coffee table.

"Yep." she grabbed her purse and coat from the hooks next to the front door. After locking up, she followed him out to his truck and couldn't help but laugh a little as he opened her door for her and helped her in.

The drive over to the next town didn't take very long, maybe twenty minutes, and they spent that twenty minutes arguing over if Hop could buy Will and Jonathan a puppy for Christmas or not.

"Come on, Joyce." Hopper grinned as he helped her out of the truck after they'd parked. "You don't think they'd love it?"

"Oh, I'm sure they would." she laughed. "But they wouldn't love cleaning up pee and poop until the stupid thing was potty trained. That'd fall to me, and the house is finally starting to look like something other than a war zone."

"They'd help." he insisted as they stepped through the doors of the restaurant. "I'd make sure of it."

Joyce was about to ask him just how he planned to do that, but he turned to the hostess before she could.

"Reservation for Hopper."

"For two?" the young girl asked, looking down at her books.

"Yep." Hopper popped the *P* and casually draped his arm around Joyce's shoulders. She was surprised by the action and jumped a little, but quickly relaxed as they waited in silence as the hostess gathered menus and silverware before instructing them to follow her. Again, Hopper surprised her by letting his arm fall from her shoulders, but just as easily taking her hand in his as they followed the hostess to a small table for two in the middle of the restaurant. It felt good, normal, and it felt right. Joyce immediately felt a wash of calm that she hadn't felt in a very, *very* long time.

Dinner was lovely. The food was good. Conversation flowed easily. Hopper kept teasing her about how she'd put on lipstick only to eat it all off with her steak. Joyce tauntingly questioned Hopper's virility when he ordered his steak well done while hers was rare.

"Eating a bleeding piece of meat doesn't make a man manly." he argued, grimacing a little as Joyce cut into her steak and flashed him the still pink meat.

"Oh, yeah." she popped the bite into her mouth. "What is it that makes a man manly, then?"

Hopper cocked his head to the side and watched her for a moment before answering. "A job. The ability to take care of his kids. Loyalty and fidelity."

Joyce swallowed hard, not having expected such a serious answer, one that was obviously a dig at Lonnie. Licking her lips, she picked up her wine and took a deep drink.

"And, of course, a badass hat and a good beard." he rubbed his chin and smirked, clearly trying to lighten the mood. Joyce couldn't help but smile as she rolled her eyes.

"Not all women like beards, Hop." she reminded him. "They chaff and leave our skin red and tender."

"Just proof of whose been there, darlin'." he finished off the last of his steak and sat back in his chair. "I've never gotten any complaints."

"You don't stay around long enough for them to complain." she said before she could stop herself, then winced. Scrunching her nose up, she gave him an apologetic look. "Sorry."

Jim met her gaze with a steady one of his own, one hand rubbing his lips before he sat forward and picked up his beer glass. "Don't be. It's true. I've also never stayed long enough to take them out to dinner, either."

Joyce smiled, cheeks warming. He was right. Even with all the women he'd been with in Hawkins, or outside of for that matter, they'd always been one offs and she had never heard of him actually taking a woman out. He caught the blush, chuckling to himself as he finished off his beer.

There was a bit of an argument over the bill, but Hopper had actually looked genuinely offended when she offered to pay her half.

"I asked you on this date, Joyce." he had nearly growled through clenched teeth. "And I'm damn well paying. Another of those things that makes a man manly, okay? Don't take away my manliness."

"Alright." Joyce conceded with a laugh. "I wouldn't want to emasculate you."

The drive back to Hawkins was decidedly more quiet. Neither of them spoke as they listened to the radio playing softly, smoke curling in the cab from their cigarettes, drifting out cracked windows. Joyce was full and happy with a warm glow from the wine. Hopper seemed more relaxed than she'd ever seen him, one hand on the steering wheel and the other holding hers on the seat between them, fingers intertwined.

Pulling his Blazer up next to her car, he let go of her hand and reached for his keys before hesitating, like he didn't know if he should shut the engine off or not. Joyce felt a bubble of excitement in her stomach and bit her lip hard before turning to him.

"The boys won't be back tonight." she said quickly. "If you want to, um, come in."

Hopper laughed, turning the engine off and pulling the keys out. They'd barely gotten into the house, Hop kicking the door shut behind him before Joyce's excitement reached it's limit and she quickly shrugged her coat and purse off, dropping them on the floor before flinging herself at him. He caught her with a '*umph*' and her lips missed his on the first try, but connected the second.

Jim chuckled into the kiss, lifting his hands to take hold of either side of her face and slow her down a little.

"Sorry." she mumbled, cheeks flaming as she pulled back. "I haven't kissed anyone in a long time. Besides the boys, of course, and that hardly counts because, well, obviously they are my sons and..."

Hopper cut her off by pressing his lips to hers briefly. "It's alright. How 'bout you just take a breath and let me kiss you, alright?"

Joyce laughed a little. "That bad, huh?"

"Nah." Jim trailed fingers down her neck to grasp her shoulders, kneading them a little. "Little out of practice is all." And then he kissed her and it was so much better. He started off light and easy, getting to reacquaint himself with her lips and Joyce closed her eyes and decided to just follow his lead.

Adult Hopper kissed much differently from teen Hopper. He wasn't in a hurry, a mad dash from his tongue down her throat to his fingers down her panties. He actually focused on the kiss, nipping her bottom lip, licking into her mouth and tasting her tongue from every angle, dragging the tip of his across the roof of her mouth until she shuddered and had to cling to his broad shoulders with a whimpering moan.

That little noise seemed to unhinge him a little and his hands wrapped around her waist, lifting her up to his height and saving himself from what was likely becoming a crick in his neck. Joyce helped by holding his shoulders tighter and wrapping her legs around his thick waist, suddenly very thankful she wore a dress.

"Joyce." he rasped against her mouth, pulling back just enough that he could look at her. "We don't have to do this tonight. We've got time. I'm not going anywhere."

"I know." And she did. Somehow, she knew he wasn't going to treat her like he had the others. He had asked her once for a little trust, but he had so much more than just a little trust. Complete trust was more like it. And possibly her whole heart. "But I want to."

A rough breath left him through his nose, like he was almost surprised, or maybe relieved, and he dove back to her mouth. He kissed her like they had years to make up for, and of course they did so Joyce kissed him back just as desperately. They left a trail of clothing from the door to her bedroom. Her shoes, kicked in random directions. Jim's boots, kicked out of and stumbled over near the sofa where he had to catch them from falling on the wall as they both laughed. His coat, tossed over the arm of the sofa. That annoying little belt was in the hall somewhere near his over shirt. By the time they made it next to her bed, her dress was unzipped and hanging around her waist and Jim's pants and belt were undone and hanging open.

Letting her down onto her feet caused Joyce's dress to fall the rest of the way off and she watched Hopper's expression darken as he eyed her nearly naked body, absently reaching for his undershirt and pulling it up and off, tossing it somewhere to the side. Joyce forgot to care about her mom panties and uninspiring bra when he pushed his jeans off and his briefs were tented with his obvious inspiration.

"Is that another thing that makes a man manly?" she asked, staring openly at his erection straining the cloth. Hopper laughed loudly and moved until he was flush against her once again, this time skin to skin.

"Maybe." he trailed a hand down her spine and squeezed her bottom, making her moan. "But that, *Mm*, the ability to cause that. That makes me feel more like a man than anything else."

"Then make me do it again." she taunted, pushing back away from him and climbing onto the bed. He followed quickly with a confident grin, divesting her of her plain panties and bra quickly. His rough hands felt wonderful on skin that had only felt her own hands for far too long and he did make her moan again when his mouth closed over one nipple. And again when his long, thick fingers found her center and played in the wetness she was creating.

"Mm." he hummed against her chest. "Or maybe it's this." he pushed two fingers inside of her. "Knowing I can make you this wet."

"You are so arrogant." she complained around another moan.

"Probably." he agreed, blue eyes flashing up to catch hers. "But then again who wouldn't be when they've got in you in bed like this. You do wonderful things for my ego, honey."

"You've always had a healthy ego, Jim." she tossed her head back when his thumb slid over her clitoris.

"True." he bit lightly at her other nipple, then neither of them were talking much at all as he pumped his fingers into her at just the right pace and his thumb found just the right rhythm and she was coming with her fingers wrapped up in his hair as she pulled his mouth back to hers.

There was a bit of a shuffle as Jim reached for his pants and found a condom and Joyce helped him put in on, which was really just as excuse to touch him while she had the chance.

"That's enough, honey." he pushed her hands away where she had taken a little too long rolling the latex down his length. "Don't finish it before it begins."

Joyce laid back, arms reaching out for him as he fell onto her, careful to keep his much larger frame from squashing her as he guided himself inside of her, pushing in slowly but surely and Joyce gasped at just how wonderful it felt to finally feel full once again.

Hopper didn't hold back and Joyce didn't let him. They took each other completely, finding pleasure in everything, learning what the other enjoyed and finding out new things that they themselves enjoyed. Hopper wasn't able to hold out long enough for her to find release again before he came, but he did turn her onto her side while he spooned up against her and brought her off the edge with his fingers and his lips on the nape of her neck.

Once he was breathing more regularly, he got out of bed and disposed of the condom in a paper towel so the boys wouldn't see it in the bathroom trash. Bringing back a pack of cigarettes, a glass of water, and a lighter, they both lay in bed, her under the covers and he with a pillow covering his more private parts while they smoked in comfortable silence.

"Do you have to work for Them tonight?" Joyce asked after a bit, stubbing out her butt and rolling onto her side to face him.

"Nope." he took the last drag of his smoke before setting the ashtray on the nightstand. Joyce never asked exactly what he did, but Jim assured her he had everything under control and that he was making certain she and her boys stayed safe. It was all she needed to know. For now.

"Will you stay?" she asked in a tired whisper, eyes already starting to fall closed.

"You want me to?" he asked, combing her bangs out of her face with

his fingers.

Joyce smiled and grabbed his hand, pressing a kiss to the calloused palm of it. "Yes."

Jim got out of bed once more to turn the lights off and make certain the front door was locked. Joyce got up as well to pull on some pajamas just in case the boys came home earlier tomorrow morning than she was expecting. No need to scar them for life with something like that. Jim came back and pulled back on his underwear and undershirt before getting back into bed with her, laying on his back and letting her use the crook of his shoulder as a pillow as his hand rubbed circles on her lower back.

"Can I tell you something?" he asked just as she was drifting off.

"Sure." she breathed into his neck, cuddling just a bit deeper into him.

"Alright." he took a deep breath, causing her to rise with his chest. "I think I might be falling for you. If that's not where you want this to head, you should probably kick me out now."

Joyce felt her eyes fly wide open, the hand that was tracing patterns on his stomach going still. Then she smiled, lifting her head so her chin rested on his peck and she could look at him.

"You aren't going anywhere, Jim Hopper." she kissed his chin. "Now, go to sleep. Manly men like yourself need their sleep because I'm going to want you one more time before the boys get home tomorrow afternoon."

Hop laughed, a deep rumble in her ear. "Yes ma'am. "

No, nothing was the same as before. Things still weren't perfect. Probably nothing ever would be again. How could it be when they knew what was just on the other side, there right next to them but unseen? But Joyce realized she didn't need perfect. She didn't want perfect. She wanted her boys alive and happy and safe, and she wanted Jim Hopper. For the moment, she had both those things.

2. Chapter 2

Notes for the Chapter:

ballroompink asked for a morning after, and I couldn't resist. This time Hoppers POV.

Hopper woke up before she did, mostly because he wasn't used to sharing a bed all night long but partly because Joyce Byers was a bed hog. It was actually a little humorous how much space such a tiny woman could take up. He'd already nudged her back towards her side of the bed several times during the night, but she was not the most restful sleeper. It seemed even sleep didn't calm the frenetic energy that was always bubbling out of her. Hop didn't mind. He enjoyed her next to him and he was a big enough guy that he could hold his own ground and not let her push him completely off the bed.

The sun was just starting to slant through the blinds when she started stirring like she might be waking up. Jim fit his body in the curve of hers, letting one hand slide under her pajama top to touch her soft belly. Joyce stiffened for a moment, then sighed and relaxed back into him. Using his nose and chin, he pushed her hair away from her neck and kissed just below her ear. He couldn't help but draw in a deep breath, inhaling her. He'd always loved the way she smelled. It wasn't something you noticed standing next to her in the grocery store or when she walked past like some women. It was more subtle. Jim disliked heavy perfumes or hair that smelled so flowery he might as well have been in a garden.

There was nothing artificial about Joyce, including her scent. Clean, warm woman with a hint of cigarette smoke.

"Are you smelling me, Jim Hopper?" she asked in a sleep roughened voice, tinged with just a little embarrassment. Jim chuckled into her hair, putting pressure on her stomach with his hand so she would slide closer to him.

"You smell good." he kissed her neck again. "Damn good. Like a woman." he lifted his head a little and put his lips to the shell of her ear. "And sex."

Joyce shivered, then giggled. Hopper nipped her ear, then shifted his hand higher on her stomach so that the tips of his fingers ghosted along the underside of her breast.

"You're far too awake for this early in the morning." she complained, but her back arched into his touch. "You know, this is my one and only day to sleep in without having to be at work or having Jonathan or Will blaring music or video games."

"We can nap afterwards." he continued kissing down her jaw and neck and Joyce helped by angling her head out of his way. "You said you wanted me one more time before the boys get home. I'm only trying to give you what you want."

"Mm." she hummed. "How generous of you." She was teasing him, but Hop cut off her chuckle by cupping one breast fully and kneading gently.

"I can be generous." he raked his teeth over the jut of her collarbone. "Wanna see how generous I can be?" he questioned, taking a nipple and plucking lightly before rolling the bud between his fingers. Joyce moaned, arching further into his hand. He was just fixing to let go of her nipple and slide his hand down her bottoms when she surprised him but rolling over quickly to face him. Before he could get more than a blink in she lifted her head and kissed him. It wasn't like her first kiss last night, all over enthusiasm and energy. It seemed she'd gotten the hang of it again and kissed him to the point where he was just about to forget his own name. He was so lost in it that when she pushed his shoulder he lay on his back compliantly. Joyce followed him over, kicking the covers out of the way and then straddling his hips as she continued kissing the life out of him.

"Joyce." he groaned when she ground her hips down onto his, his erection caught between their bodies and the pressure adding to his already muddled brain.

"I can be generous, too." she grinned wickedly at him and Jim couldn't help his startled laugh. Damn, but Joyce in bed was a treat. Back in high school they hadn't gone all the way. Her hand rubbing him off or his fingers inside of her, but that was it. He'd never even gotten her jeans all the way off back then. And adult Jim realized

that he might not have ever gotten her off in all that time. Hell, he was just a kid and didn't know exactly what he was doing. He remembered her being enthusiastic about what they were doing, but she drew the line and was firm in not going further. Hop hadn't minded much. Like any sixteen year old, he was just happy to have a girls hand on him. There was a part of him that was happy they'd never gone any further. They'd started that high school fling knowing it was nothing else and Hopper realized now that he wanted sex with Joyce to be something more than just fucking for fuckings sake. And their first time last night, that had been something more. It'd been worth the wait, worth the long road back.

"Whadda doing, sweetheart?" Jim asked as Joyce started shoving his shirt up and pressing lips and tongue to whatever bit of skin she could get to.

"Being generous." she raked her teeth over the skin of his hip just above the elastic band of his underwear.

"Jesus." he groaned, jerking upright so he could rip his shirt off his suddenly overheated body. Joyce laughed at his enthusiasm, then shoved him back down as she worked his underwear off. Her first touch was hesitant, slightly calloused fingers closing around his length gently.

"Jesus." he groaned louder this time when she added her lips and then tongue. She had no skill, her inexperience in the act telling, but Jim found he really didn't give a damn. Not when she was licking and kissing him, her touches growing bolder the longer she worked him. Hopper let her know how much he enjoyed what she was doing, raking his fingers through her hair to hold it out of her way and murmuring words of encouragement and praise. Most were mindless but as long as she didn't stop he'd keep saying them.

"Alright." he tugged on her hair to get her to pull back. "That's enough, honey." he sat up and pulled her up into his lap and quickly pulled her shirt up and off.

"Was that okay?" she asked, rubbing the back of her hand against her lips. Jim huffed a laugh, then kissed her firmly.

"More than. Now I want to make love to you before the boys get here." Somehow Joyce's cheeks grew even redder, but she smiled and nodded. Hopper laid her down and removed the rest of her clothes, working his way back up her body with his hands and mouth. He only had one condom left in his wallet and he had every intention of making that one time worth it.

Joyce clung to him as he worked himself inside of her. He took her slowly at first, leisurely thrusting while his hands and mouth explored what parts of her he could reach. Eventually Joyce was canting her hips up into him, trying to gain more friction. Hop helped her by rolling them over and sitting up against the headboard so she could take what she needed from his lap. When she started to lose her rhythm close to her climax, Jim took over and held her hips in place as he thrust up into, watching her face as she lost herself. With a breathless curse, he joined her shortly afterwards.

He didn't know how long they lay there together, but eventually he urged her off his lap so he could take care of the condom, not wanting to risk it coming off and voiding the entire point of wearing one. Not that the prospect of having a kid with Joyce was repugnant. It was just hardly the time and they would be skipping a few steps. Like him dating her properly, the way Lonnie fucking Byers never did. A proposal and a wedding also. Things he wanted to give her eventually. Then they could maybe work on a kid, either having one of their own or adopting one that needed a home.

But Jim was getting ahead of himself. For now he would work on wooing Joyce.

When he got back from the bathroom he found Joyce had fallen back to sleep, this time naked and only half covered with the rumpled sheets. Hopper pulled his underwear and jeans back on before snatching up his t shirt and going into her kitchen to start coffee. He was in the middle of putting bread in the toaster while smoking a cigarette when he heard a car pull up. A glance out the window showed Jonathan and Will had gotten home. Not wanting to embarrass them or Joyce, Hopper quickly picked up the trail of discarded clothing and had just hung up his coat by the door when a key hit the lock. Kicking his boots to the side, he returned to the kitchen to take the toast out of the toaster.

"Morning boys." Hopper called over his shoulder as he casually buttered the toast.

"Morning, sir." Will called back, completely unfazed by the unexpected morning guest.

"Go brush your teeth, Will." Jonathan gave Will's shoulder a shove. "Since you conveniently forgot to take your toothbrush last night."

"I really did forget." Will grumbled before heading down the hall. Hop chuckled as he plated the toast.

"You want breakfast, Jon?" Hopper asked, pulling a mug from the cabinet and pouring his coffee.

"I ate at Steve's." Jonathan moved further into the kitchen. "I will take some coffee though. And you can explain why you're here this early in the morning."

Hopper poured the coffee and turned to hand it to the younger man. He took his time sitting at the table and putting out his cigarette while Jonathan took the chair opposite him.

"Is my being here a problem, Jon?" he asked, pushing the toast to the side and meeting Jon's perceptive gaze.

"Depends on how long you're going to hang around." Jon took a drink of the coffee, and then sat back in his chair. "My mom's been through enough. She doesn't need heartbreak from you." Hopper nodded, knowing he deserved the veiled accusation. He liked that Jonathan was protective of Joyce. At least one man in her life up until now took care of her.

"I'm here for as long as Joyce wants me here. I agree she's been through hell. All of you have been. I just wanna be there to help ease the burden for all of you. And I get that I haven't been the sticking sort. You're right to question that. But none of them have been your mom." he sat back in his own chair and drew a deep breath through his nose. "She helps ease my burdens. Life's better with her, with all three of you, and I just want to do the same."

Jon was silent for a long beat, eyes steady on Jim's. Then a smile

quirked the corner of his mouth and he pushed his chair back from the table. "You want some eggs with that toast?"

Jim let out a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding. "Sure, kid."

"Can you make them runny, Jonathan?" Will asked, bounding back into the kitchen.

"It's all a game of chance." Jonathan laughed. "You get what you get."

"I can make them runny." Hopper stood up and took the carton of eggs from Jon. "I'll make the eggs. You and Will start formulating an argument to get your mom to agree to me getting you guys a puppy for Christmas."

"A puppy!" Will almost shouted.

"Mom'll never say yes." Jonathan chuckled with a shake of his head.

"Three against one, Jon." Hopper pointed out. "Come up with a good enough argument. Your mom would do almost anything for you boys. Just don't tell her I said that."

"Don't tell me what, now?" Joyce asked as she strolled into the kitchen, cheeks all flushed and looking embarrassed and uncertain. "Morning boys."

Both boys murmured their good mornings, Will quickly launching into a story about the adventures in Dustin's den last night. Hopper turned back to his eggs with a grin, knowing that Will was deliberately sidetracking Joyce from her question.

"Want some eggs?" Jim asked Joyce during a break in the detailed story, plating out Will's eggs with a slice of toast.

"Sure."

"How'd ya like them?"

"However they turn out." she chuckled, adding some sugar to her coffee. Hopper smiled at her, enjoying the way her lips looked a little swollen. The pale skin of her neck was just a little red from his beard,

not enough to notice if you hadn't been looking for it. Hopper was looking for it.

He made her eggs hard, like he liked his own, then sat the plate in front of her with some toast as he took the chair across from her. Will was currently sidetracked from his story by some morning cartoon as he ate his breakfast at the coffee table and Jonathan had disappeared into his bedroom.

"So..." Joyce forked her eggs around without looking at him. "I take it the boys know."

"Will doesn't seem to notice, or care, but Jon questioned why I was here this early."

"Oh god." she groaned. "What'd you tell him?"

"He seventeen, Joyce." Hop laughed. "I didn't have to tell him anything. He's not stupid. Or blind."

"How embarrassing." she grumbled, shoving forkful into her mouth.

"S'not. He was fine with it. And despite you not wanting to acknowledge it, he does know what sex is. As long as it's kept abstract from him, I don't think he gives a shit so long as you're happy." Joyce nodded, looking down at her plate as she continued eating. Hop went back to his food as well and neither spoke again until their plates were empty and Jim was rinsing everything off in the sink.

"I am, you know." Joyce said as she squirted some dish soap into the filling sink.

"Hm?" Jim took the soap and drizzled some on a rag so he could start washing.

"Happy." she shrugged, taking up the space beside him to rinse the dishes before placing them in the drying rack. "How could I not be with such a manly man like yourself?"

Hop smiled down at the dishwater, the hot water stinging his hands a little as he reached in for another dish to wash.

After Sara, and after Diane, he never thought he'd be happy again. Never really wanted to be happy again. His daughter had been his world, his light, his everything. Diane had been a good wife, a wonderful mother, and he had loved her. When it all ended, he didn't think he deserved another chance so he'd never sought it out again. But he knew, damnit he had known the second Joyce Byers turned up in his office that fateful day trembling and frantic and begging him to help her, that was it. He'd do whatever it took to help her, whatever it took so she didn't have to face the same terrible hell he had to face. And in the process, through all the fear and confusion, through conspiracy and shady government workers, through Demogorgon's and the Upside Down, he'd found happiness once again.

It wasn't a perfect happiness. He still missed his daughter, still mourned the loss of her light. He still felt guilty for letting Diane down and not fighting harder to keep them together after Sara even as he acknowledged it wasn't entirely his fault alone. He'd helped Will, but failed another little girl, and he was trying to make up for that during his 'moonlighting'. But looking at Joyce now, those big brown eyes of hers looking up at him so full of happiness instead of frantic fear, he didn't want perfect. He wanted Joyce. He wanted to love her and her sons and them to care for him in return. He wanted to continue making them happy and to be apart of their lives. And right now, he had that. And for the first time in over five years, he was happy again.